



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION & LABOR
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE STATEMENT

Opening Statement of Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA), Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment
"Examining the Policies and Priorities of the Corporation for National and Community Service"

December 14, 2022

(As prepared for delivery)

"Although Christmas is not yet here and it's not February, this hearing feels like Groundhog Day all over again. Continuously, we call AmeriCorps before this Committee and every time we do so we ask it to get its act together—and every time it fails to do so. I would also like to say that I think the number of volunteer hours, which volunteer service means 'volunteer'—unpaid—could be done even without this organization, and that there are far less expensive ways to deliver educational awards than an agency who cannot get its fiscal house in order.

"This agency has a long-standing record of abject failure extending back to its creation in 1993. A 2016 AmeriCorps Office of the Inspector General (OIG) report stated AmeriCorps fails to 'provide effective oversight of its grant portfolio, leaving those funds unnecessarily vulnerable to waste, fraud, mismanagement and abuse.' Since that 2016 report, AmeriCorps has continually failed to produce the necessary financial statements needed for a full audit. AmeriCorps' continued mismanagement of taxpayer funds is inexcusable.

"We have repeatedly asked AmeriCorps to modernize its systems—it has not done so. We have asked AmeriCorps that it must implement more accountability for its programs—it has not done so.

"And thus, the problems continue. Just this year, the Department of Justice found that Denver Public Schools misused over \$2 million in AmeriCorps funds in the 2015-2016 grant year. In October of 2021, a former Hawaii public official pled guilty to embezzling over \$38,000 from AmeriCorps. How many more abuses of taxpayer funds is AmeriCorps letting slip through the cracks? This level of mismanagement is dangerous and unacceptable, and it gives the agency and organization a bad name considering the numerous people who volunteer through its guidance.

"Perhaps it is time for everyone to admit that this failed agency needs major reform. How many more taxpayer dollars will be misspent before we admit that the current idea does not work? Yet instead of demanding changes, the Biden administration attempted to give AmeriCorps an

influx of \$15 billion through its so-called Build Back Better legislation. Pouring billions more into an agency that can't seem to get its act together will only get us more of the same fraud and mismanagement we've seen over 29 years and I can give you numerous examples of truly volunteer organizations, individuals who have stepped up to provide services in their community with no funding from the federal government or AmeriCorps.

"In truth, AmeriCorps is an expensive agency that has failed to be a good steward of taxpayer dollars.

"America is a generous country. We often rank as one of the most generous nations when it comes to money donated and time given to charity. An estimated 63 million Americans volunteer yearly, totaling \$139 billion worth of time. The United States has almost 2 million active nonprofits. Additionally, 81 percent of Americans say they have donated money to charity this past year. Americans are already volunteering and giving their time, and often do so more efficiently and effectively than an overloaded, bureaucratic agency.

"It is one of this Committee's most important duties to hold the federal government accountable, and agencies like AmeriCorps prove why that is so important. I sound like a broken record, but every time AmeriCorps comes before us, we say the same thing: AmeriCorps is a failed program that needs a complete overhaul and every time we get the same non-response. This is as true today as it was the first time it was said—if not more so.

"It's time for my colleagues to take their blinders off, stop relying on promises to do better next time, and start thinking about a rebuild and true reform."

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